



GNATHODON STRIGIROSTRIS, *Jard.*

Gnathodon.

Gnathodon strigirostris, Jard. in Ann. and Mag. of Nat. Hist., vol. xvi. p. 175. pl. ix.

THE researches of modern zoologists have not perhaps brought to light a more curious object than the bird here represented, a single specimen of which is in the collection of Sir William Jardine, Bart., to whose kindness and liberality I am indebted for permission to include a drawing of it in the present work. I regret to say that no intelligence whatever could be obtained as to its habits, or the precise locality of which it is a native; it was purchased by Lady Harvey at a sale in Edinburgh, where the other objects sold at the same time were all Australian, and mostly peculiar to the south-eastern coast of that country; hence I have been induced to include a figure of it in the present work for which I feel that no apology is required, as the Plate cannot fail to be viewed with interest by all ornithologists, and will probably induce residents in the country to investigate the history of so remarkable a species. While we know so little as we do respecting it, every ornithologist must form his own opinion as to the place it should occupy in the natural system; and these opinions will doubtless be very various; the contour of the bill, the form and position of the nostrils are different from those of any other species with which we are acquainted, and although pertaining to so much smaller a bird strongly remind one of the celebrated Dodo; the form of the body and wings and the structure of the feathers differ but slightly from those of the *Columbidæ*, to which family it is, in my opinion, most nearly allied; for although at a first glance its strongly hooked upper and deeply notched under mandible would seem to indicate a sanguinary disposition, and that its food consists of animal substances, I am inclined to believe that it is frugivorous or granivorous, and that the remarkably formed bill is expressly adapted to denude palm-nuts or other strongly coated seeds of their hard outer covering; the maxillæ are very wide, and the nakedness of the throat would indicate that the gullet is capable of sufficient dilatation to admit of the passage of articles of food of considerable size.

The probably unique specimen from which my figure is taken is very perfect, with the exception of the scales of the front of the tarsi, which are unfortunately wanting; I am consequently left in doubt as to whether the legs as far as the knees, if not the upper part of the tarsi, have or have not been clothed with feathers.

The first description of this species was published by Sir William Jardine in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' above referred to, wherein he states that "we are indebted to Lady Harvey, whose extensive collection of natural history in Edinburgh is always open when science can be promoted, for a specimen of this remarkable bird;" and adds, "we are aware of no existing description, though there is one allusion made to a bird which may eventually turn out to be this. In Mr. Strickland's Report on the Recent Progress and Present State of Ornithology, read before the British Association at York, it is stated, 'The recent American voyage of discovery will extend our knowledge of Polynesian zoology, and its researches will be made known by Mr. Titian Peale, who is said to have discovered among other rarities a new bird allied to the Dodo, which he proposes to name *Didunculus*;' and we believe '*strigirostris*' has been applied specifically."

The structure of the wing indicates that its powers of flight are considerable.

Lores and a small patch on each side of the throat bare and apparently red; head, neck, breast and belly glossy greenish black; feathers of the upper part of the back black, with a crescent-shaped mark of glossy green at the tip of each feather; back, wings, tail and under tail-coverts rich deep chestnut-red; primaries and secondaries greyish black; bill orange; tarsi and feet apparently reddish flesh-colour.

The figures represent the bird in two positions of the natural size.